(b) Details of forest land diverted for various developmental projects between 1952—1980, are as follows:—

Purpose	Area diverted (Lakh hectares)
Agriculture . . .	26·24
River Valley Projects .	5·02
Industries & Townships	1·34
Transmission lines, roads	0·60
Miscellaneous . .	10·08
TOTAL : .	43·28

Large scale diversion of forest lands to non- forest uses has brought us face to face with a major ecological and socio-economic crisis.

Remedial action has been taken through enactment of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 to check indiscriminate diversion of forest lands to non-forest uses States/UTs have been advised to strengthen the enforcement machiery at the field level to take action against encroachers. National Wastelands Development Board has been set up with the object of bringing 5 million hectares of land every year under firewood and fodder plantations. This would also help restores the ecological balance.

Depletion of forests

812. SHRI SHANKER SINH VAGHELA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the present forest depletion rate is 1.5 million hectares, which may lead to zero forest in about 20 years and that in hill tracts in some States the present forest cover does not exceed 20 per cent against the desired 60 per cent;

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard; and

(c) what steps Government propose to take to meet the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI Z. R. ANSARI): (a) and (b) According to the National Remote Sensing Agency the rate of forest depletion between 1972-75 and 1980-82 was 1.3 million hectares per year. It is true that forest cover in hill tracts in some of the States is less than 20 per cent against the optimum of 60 per cent envisaged in the National Forest Policy, 1952. However, a detailed survey has not been carried out.

(c) Guidelines have been issued to the State Governments

(i) to avoid clearfelling of natural forests and where such fellings are inevitable for restoration of crop or other silvicultural considerations it should be restricted to areas not exceeding 10 hectares in the hills and 25 hectares in the plains.

(ii) to consider banning of fellings in the hills above 1000 metres, at least for some years.

(iii) to identify critical areas in the hills and mountains which require protection from felling of forests and need immediate vigorous afforestation.

(iv) to set a part 4 per cent of the geographical area as protection areas like wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, biosphere reserve etc.

National wastelands Development Board has been set up with the object of bringing 5 million hectares of land every year under fuelwood and fodder plantations.